5.6 Streamline Solar Permitting for Small Solar Installations

10 Points **15 Points** **20 Points**

Action Updates

This action has been revised for the **current certification cycle**. A version of this action from the prior program year is available for comparison. Edits are highlighted in yellow. (Last updated 2020)

Objective

Encourage residential solar deployment by reducing transactional costs for small solar PV installations by making the solar permitting process transparent and simple.

What to Do

Municipalities that complete all sub-elements of this action (including those not required for Sustainable CT points) may qualify for Bronze status in the national SolSmart community designation program. ***Note:*** If seeking dual program credit, you must also complete a SolSmart Statement. Visit https://solsmart.org to learn more about how you can receive dual recognition, and even Gold status!

1. Streamline solar permitting for small solar installations. **(10 Points)**

   Elements 5.6.1a - 5.6.1e must be completed to receive credit.

   a. Review zoning requirements and identify restrictions that intentionally or unintentionally prohibit solar PV development. Compile findings in a memo. Consider the actions on this list of best practices. If your town is interested in SolSmart designation, this review can be conducted by SolSmart (see Other No Cost Assistance).

   Submit: A copy of the memo. A sample of the memo is available for download.

   Timeframe for Credit: Eligible for new action credit and rolling credit. This action falls under the action type "Websites, Maps, Inventories, Checklists, Assessments, Plans, Ordinances, Policies, Regulations and Resolutions" (see "Timeframe for Credit" Guidance Document for submission requirements).

   b. Create and make available an online checklist detailing the required permit(s), submittals, and steps of your community's solar permitting process. Consider using the CT Standardized Instruction Template for Solar PV Permitting.

   Submit: A hyperlink and a screenshot of your online permitting checklist (which applies to at least the permit process for solar).

   Timeframe for Credit: Eligible for new action credit and rolling credit. This action falls under the action type "Websites, Maps, Inventories, Checklists, Assessments, Plans, Ordinances, Policies, Regulations and Resolutions" (see "Timeframe for Credit" Guidance Document for submission requirements).

   c. Require no more than one application form for a residential rooftop solar PV project. Consider using the CT Standardized Solar PV Permit Application.

   Submit: A hyperlink(s) to your residential solar PV permitting process and permit application form required by your municipality.

Timeframe for Credit: Eligible for new action credit and rolling credit. This action falls under the action type "Websites, Maps, Inventories, Checklists, Assessments, Plans, Ordinances, Policies, Regulations and Resolutions" (see "Timeframe for Credit" Guidance Document for submission requirements).

d. Train building inspectors, permitting, and inspection staff on solar PV and/or solar and storage systems technologies and best practices for permitting/inspecting. Check the Office of Education and Data Management's Continuing Education calendar for upcoming solar PV trainings, the resources listed under the Resources section below, or visit www.energizect.com/sunrisene for other online resources. Training must have occurred in the past five years. (Acceptable training enables staff to review all components of the PV system at once and covers both permitting and inspection).

Submit: The training name, host/sponsor organization, date of training, and the name and title of the municipal staff person(s) who attended. Submit a short description of topics covered during the training and, if available, training materials or a link to the training. Please list any continuing education requirements attendees received.

Timeframe for Credit: Eligible for new action credit and rolling credit. This action falls under the action type "Websites, Maps, Inventories, Checklists, Assessments, Plans, Ordinances, Policies, Regulations and Resolutions" (see "Timeframe for Credit" Guidance Document for submission requirements).

e. Train planning staff on best practices in planning and zoning for solar PV. Training must have occurred within the past five years.

Submit: The training name, host/sponsor organization, date of training, and the name and title of the municipal staff person who attended. Submit a short description of topics covered during the training and, if available, training materials or a link to the training. Please list any continuing education requirements attendees received.

Timeframe for Credit: Eligible for new action credit and rolling credit. This action falls under the action type "Websites, Maps, Inventories, Checklists, Assessments, Plans, Ordinances, Policies, Regulations and Resolutions" (see "Timeframe for Credit" Guidance Document for submission requirements).

You may complete one or both of the additional steps below to receive up to 10 additional points. You must complete steps 5.6.1a-5.6.1e prior to steps 5.6.1f and/or 5.6.1g. If you are seeking SolSmart Bronze certification, both steps are required in addition to steps 1-5 listed above.

f. Optional: Review the permitting process for efficiency improvements. Reduce processing time to 30 days or fewer (or 10 days or fewer, if you want to receive SolSmart certification.) Consider the actions on this list of best practices. **(5 additional points)**

Submit: A document that tracks the date of permit application submissions and decision dates; or documentation from a local solar installation company indicating the average permit turnaround time; or a memo stating that the typical permitting process is 30 days or less.

Timeframe for Credit: Eligible for new action credit and rolling credit. This action falls under the action type "Websites, Maps, Inventories, Checklists, Assessments, Plans, Ordinances, Policies, Regulations and Resolutions" (see "Timeframe for Credit" Guidance Document for submission requirements).

g. Optional: Include quantifiable metrics and/or specific actions for solar PV development in the most current version of relevant plans (e.g., energy plan, climate plan, plan of conservation and development.). **(5 additional points)**

Submit: A hyperlink(s) to the relevant plans that incorporate solar PV goals or metrics. Please indicate relevant sections.

Timeframe for Credit: Eligible for new action credit and rolling credit. This action falls under the action type "Websites, Maps, Inventories, Checklists, Assessments, Plans, Ordinances, Policies, Regulations and Resolutions" (see "Timeframe for Credit" Guidance Document for submission requirements).

OR

2. Achieve at least Bronze status in the national SolSmart community designation program. **(10 Points)**

   Submit: A copy of your final prerequisite summary and credit summary.

   Timeframe for Credit: Eligible for new action credit and rolling credit. This action falls under the action type "Outreach, Education, Programs, Campaigns, Recognition/Designation in External Program, and Funding" (see "Timeframe for Credit" Guidance Document for submission requirements).

Timeframe for Credit

Actions can either be "New" or considered for "Rolling Credit."

New Action Credit. Any action completed within the past three years (from January 1 of the year seeking certification) is eligible for potential certification points. If you are applying for recertification in your year of expiration, you may not claim New Action Credit for items that previously received credit.

Rolling Credit. For any action older than three years (from January 1 of the year seeking certification), you must demonstrate ongoing, currently relevant, and meaningful impact in your community to be considered for certification points. If you are applying for recertification in your year of expiration, you must apply for Rolling Credit for any item that previously received credit, even if it was completed within the past three years.

View the "Timeframe for Credit" Guidance Document for detailed submission requirements.

Engaging Partners

Sustainable CT encourages regional collaboration and other forms of partnership. For every action, please complete the "Partners" box in your submission, indicating the name(s) of any municipalities and/or organizations you partnered with (if any) and a brief description of your municipality's role. If you collaborate with other municipalities, each community will receive points. For additional information, please see the "Partners Guidance Document".

Potential Municipal and Community Collaborators

Staff from the building, planning and zoning, and engineering departments, and a representative from the planning and zoning, or energy commission could be helpful in implementing this action.

Funding

If available, below are potential funding sources specific to this Action. For a complete listing of potential funding opportunities to assist with implementing Sustainable CT Actions, please visit the Sustainable CT Grants Portal, which is searchable by Action. Please also visit the Support for Your Town page for opportunities for technical assistance and other supports.

- Urban Act Grant Program
- Municipal Grant Program (MGP)

Resources

Toolkits, Calculators, Guidance Documents

- CT Green Bank: No-cost technical assistance, email Emily Basham at Emily.Basham@CTGreenBank.com.
- SolSmart Resources page includes resources for all 7 actions
- CT Rooftop Solar PV Permitting Guide
- CT 2016 Municipal Solar Scorecards
- CRCOG Regional Permitting Initiative
- From Paperwork to Panels: Video overview of home solar installation process.
- Acadia Center, "Community Energy Vision, Action Guide for Connecticut"
- Training Resources:

- 5.6.1d
  - Interstate Renewable Energy Council training portal
  - U.S Department of Energy Sunshot webinars:
    - Efficient Solar Permitting for Your Jurisdiction: Pre-Application Materials and Application Submittal and Review
    - Efficient Solar Permitting for Your Jurisdiction: Inspections
    - SolSmart Best Practices for Solar PV Permitting: Season 1 and Season 2
  - P-8 and I-1 training
    - Best Practices for Solar PV Permitting & Inspection (session 1, permitting I) (P-8 when taken with session 2, below; I-1 when taken with sessions 2 and 3 below)
    - Best Practices for Solar PV Permitting & Inspection (session 2, permitting II) (P-8 when taken with session 1, above; I-1 when taken with sessions 1 above and 3 below)
    - Best Practices for Solar PV Permitting & Inspection (session 3, inspection I) (I-1 when taken with sessions 1 and 2 above)
- 5.6.1e
  - PZD-9 training
    - SolSmart Webinar: Planning & Zoning Best Practices for Large-Scale Solar
    - SolSmart Webinar: Best Practices in Solar Planning and Zoning
  - U.S. Department of Energy SunShot webinar: Promoting Solar Energy Use Through Local Development Regulations
  - U.S. Department of Energy SunShot webinar: Promoting Solar Energy Use Through Local Plans

Organizations and Relevant Program

- CT Green Bank
- SolSmart

Why This Matters

Each of Connecticut's 169 municipalities has its own permitting processes, permit application and fee structure, which makes widespread solar deployment a challenge. By streamlining the procedures and documents required for a permit, your town or city can encourage more sustainable projects, including solar, and bring more business into your community.

We developed the recommendations and resources for improving rooftop solar PV (< 1 Megawatt) permitting in this action from research conducted by the Connecticut Rooftop Solar Challenge team. These suggestions align with the work of leading organizations throughout the nation that are working to help understand and improve solar PV permitting processes.

Benefits

You can reduce everyone's guesswork and frustration by creating open access to information, streamlining permit application submissions, implementing online permitting software and waiving or reducing permit fees.

Help contractors get it right the first time by clarifying the information they should provide when they apply for a solar PV permit.

CT Success Stories

- Coventry - Oct 2019 Certification